

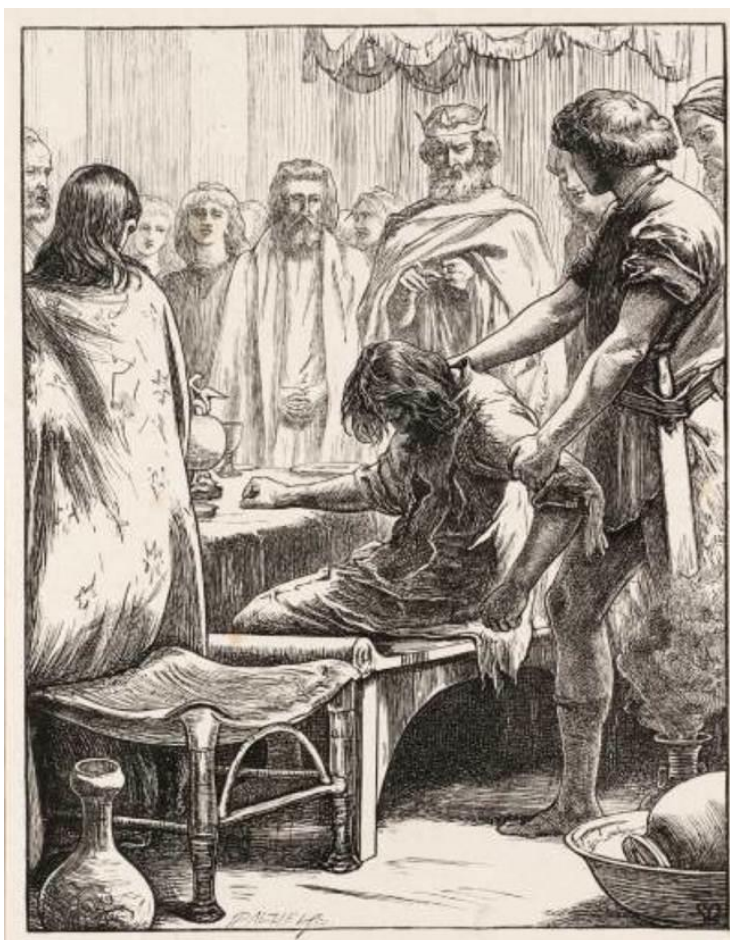


Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time A



The Marriage Feast by John Everett Millais,
from "Illustrations to 'The parables of our Lord'", engraved by the Dalziel Brothers, 1864..



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Saint Francis' Prayer in Praise of God, Given to Brother Leo

You are holy, Lord, the only God,
and Your deeds are wonderful.

You are strong.

You are great.

You are the Most High.

You are Almighty.

You, Holy Father are King of heaven and earth.

You are Three and One, Lord God, all Good.

You are Good, all Good, supreme Good, Lord God, living and true.

You are love.

You are wisdom.

You are humility.

You are endurance.

You are rest.

You are peace.

You are joy and gladness.

You are justice and moderation.

You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.

You are beauty.

You are gentleness.

You are our protector.

You are our guardian and defender.

You are our courage.

You are our haven and our hope.

You are our faith, our great consolation.

You are our eternal life, Great and Wonderful Lord, God
Almighty, Merciful Savior. Amen.

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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's parable is a continuation of the themes of previous weeks: "Actions speak louder than words"
- ▶ Kingdom living requires diligent watchfulness.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First reading: Isaiah 25, 6-10

- ▶ Today's reading from Isaiah looks to the end times. The prophet seeks to prepare the people for its coming by using the imagination and by forming a visual image. Who would not be excited by images of plentiful food, rich wine and juicy fruits?
- ▶ Isaiah paints a portrait of how the world will bounce back after its destruction. It is helpful to note that this reading was written after the exile when Israel was in the process of rebuilding itself as a people and a nation of faithful believers.
- ▶ The destruction of which he speaks is due to the lack of faithfulness on the part of God's people; put simply, it is due to sin. Not only will the people suffer, the earth will be devastated by its impact.
- ▶ There is hope, however. God can change God's mind. God's hammer need not come crashing down.
- ▶ The feast is presented as a sign that God will relent and save the world from destruction. God will rebuild and restore Jerusalem; God will restore his people. They can do no less than make merry and lavishly feast on rich foods and God's incredible, unconditional mercy.
- ▶ No more tears will be shed once God has accomplished what God has promised to do.
- ▶ This is the earliest recorded citation in which Scripture affirms that God will be triumphant over death.
- ▶ As stated in other sessions, just as the vineyard is a metaphor for the reign of God so too is the feast a banquet resplendent with layers of metaphorical images.
- ▶ The meal/feast/banquet had profound implications in Biblical history.
- ▶ To break bread with someone meant that a mutual covenant relationship was formed. A profound bond was created by the simple act of breaking bread, a bond between individuals and bond between the individual and community.
- ▶ There were various types of banquets that marked specific events or themes. Two such types were the ritual meal and the ceremonial meal.
- ▶ Thus banquets were celebrated to mark special events such as the reconciliation of persons, groups of persons and the reconciliation of nations. Such banquets served a ritual function.
- ▶ Ceremonial banquets ritualized the bond between people in attendance at a specific meal event.

- ▶ The banquet Isaiah laid before us in today's reading is both a ritual banquet and a ceremonial banquet.
- ▶ As a ritual banquet Isaiah's vision looks to the covenant between God and his people. God promised to provide providential care for Israel and Israel in turn promised fidelity and love for God, neighbor and self and care for God's creation, all people, especially the poor. Scripture chronicles a familiar pattern; Israel sinned, God forgave them, Israel repented. Today's reading celebrates that forgiveness and repentance.
- ▶ As a ceremonial banquet Isaiah celebrates the transformation from death to life and sorrow to joy of all who partake in that festive meal.
- ▶ Isaiah encourages the people to look to the future when God will be triumphant and death will have no more sting. Every tear will be wiped away because God has acted; God is sovereign, omnipotent and faithful. What God says, God does.
- ▶ The banquet/feast is a traditional sign that God accomplished what he set out to do. Sorrow and death will be turned to joy.
- ▶ This pericope foreshadows and echoes what future generations would come to believe about the Eucharist. It is a celebration of passage from death to life. When we partake in the Eucharist we are partakers in the death and resurrection of Christ, his passage from death to new life.
- ▶ The Eucharist is an eschatological banquet here on earth as we await the final consummation and our participation in the eternal feast with the Lord.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about ourselves?

Second Reading: Philippians 4, 12-14. 19-20

- ▶ Paul's primary theme is the cross of Christ and our participation in that cross. While it would appear to some that Paul was too shy or embarrassed to ask for help, in truth he was more intent on bearing the burden of the cross for the sake of Christ's eternal mission.
- ▶ Another concern for Paul was his rightful claim to apostleship. Paul considered himself an apostle even though he did not have the necessary credentials.
- ▶ An apostle was a minister who had a personal, earthly encounter with the Lord.
- ▶ Paul had a post-resurrection experience of the risen Christ and for him that was enough.
- ▶ However, bearing the burden of the cross also gave him claim to apostleship.

- ▶ Apostles were commissioned to readily embrace suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ's mission here on earth as they await the glory of eternal life in heaven.
- ▶ Paul found peace and joy in every difficult situation of his life. He praised God in earnest whether he was experiencing famine or feast.
- ▶ Paul found all worldly concerns insignificant in the face of Christ's glory. He refused to be distracted from his intimate union with God in Christ.
- ▶ Therefore he was willing to embrace and accept anything and everything that would befall him if it meant a richer more intimate union with Jesus. No greater peace can be achieved as far as Paul was concerned.
- ▶ Greek philosophy understood the principle well. The Greeks referred to it as a satisfaction and self-reliance that comes from the abandonment of all desire by an act of will on the part of the one seeking such peace of heart.
- ▶ Paul abandoned all earthly desire and in its place was an intense hunger for union with Christ. Nothing more would suffice.
- ▶ Paul's kenosis (emptying of self) was understood as the ultimate gift and grace of God.
- ▶ Paul loved each of his communities. He was especially thankful to the Philippian community for their love and hospitality and their desire to minister to his needs.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this reading?
- ▶ In what way does this reading speak to your own relationship with Jesus?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced suffering or persecution for the sake of what is right? What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced a hunger to know God better? Describe your experience. What did that experience teach you about God and God's relationship with you?

Gospel: Matthew 22, 1-14

Before going further the catechist invites reflection on the following questions. Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What touched your heart in the Gospel today?
- ▶ What is this Gospel about?
- ▶ How would you summarize it?

- ▶ Jesus loved surprise endings. His parables are a testament to that assertion. Jesus constantly told his followers that they must be open to surprise. The parables echo a constant theme that the reign of God is a surprise. It is not what people expect or think it ought to be. Disciples are to expect to be amazed.
- ▶ Those who are certain of their salvation may be surprised. The self-righteous will be particularly blind to what God is doing. Thus, disciples must be aware and attentive.
- ▶ The Gospels for the previous Sundays are a further testament to Matthew's catechism: actions speak louder than lip service.
- ▶ Consider the cultural milieu of this Gospel. A king normally would not have invited the lower class to his banquet. Meals were a mirror image of the way in which society was ordered by class. The king's invitation list would only have included the elite class of the day.
- ▶ In today's parable the king's original list was comprised of the above-mentioned class of people.
- ▶ Not unlike similar elite gatherings today, it was a common practice for people to wait to see who was invited to the banquet. If certain influential people decided not to attend, it might prompt others to do likewise. Thus, everyone waited until the last minute to decide if they were going to attend.
- ▶ The king sent his servant out to those who had already been invited.
- ▶ The invitees showed very poor taste and manners by their refusal to attend. To make matters worse they provided a weak excuse. What an insult to the king!
- ▶ What business transaction could be more important than the king's son's wedding?
- ▶ Further insult to the king would follow. The second group of invitees not only refused the invitation they murdered the king's messengers.
- ▶ Could there be any greater shame leveled upon the king? Who would be so foolish?
- ▶ Ancient Palestine was a shame-based culture that demanded reciprocity for misdeeds perpetrated against one another. To save face the king simply must retaliate. Response needed to be swift and decisive if his honor was to be restored.
- ▶ Herein lies the surprise: horror of horrors the king invited ordinary common

people, lower class people, to his son's wedding feast.

- ▶ He went far and wide extending his invitation. He wanted to insure it was a public spectacle so he had his messengers go to a gathering place where it was common for both classes to congregate.
- ▶ The king's now radically changed list posed a risk for the king. His action very well could bring condemnation upon him by the rich elite. It could bring a similar reaction to the elite who decided to attend in spite of the shunning by their contemporaries.
- ▶ There could be no greater travesty in such a culture than for the upper class to associate with the lower class. It was considered akin to suicide in their ordered world.
- ▶ The list now complete there was still one person in attendance who refused the king's presentation of the garment. "What is the world coming to?" mused the king! Now even a lower class person rejected the king's offer. The king, in an act of reciprocity, expelled him instantly!
- ▶ Who is the focus of Jesus' message? Jesus was focusing his attention on the chief priests and elders who set themselves apart and above of everyone else. The contrast he was making was stark. God was all-inclusive; they were exclusive.
- ▶ Jesus point? All are welcome in the kingdom of God. No one is excluded.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites reflection on one of the following questions.

- ▶ How would you feel if you were the king in this parable?
 - ▶ If the king is an image of God, what does this parable teach us about God?
 - ▶ Who are the excluded ones at our banquet feast today?
 - ▶ What is the challenge for us, his disciples?
-
- ▶ Another proposed theme in today's Gospel is salvation history. Consider the following: the king is God; the banquet is God's reign. The son in this instance is Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders, Israel, rejected the son. The servant/messengers represented the prophets and the apostles.
 - ▶ Matthew alludes to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The parable states that the city of the attendees was destroyed. He reminds the listener/reader not to miss the point. Such destruction is what awaits all who fail to recognize what God is doing in and through his Son, Jesus Christ. Such destruction is what awaits those who reject the heralds of his message: prophets, apostles and ministers of the Gospel.

- ▶ God invited everyone to the banquet. Every person has been given the freedom to accept or reject God's invitation. When everyone is invited there are good and bad among us. Jesus' point is not to be missed. Some were expelled from the banquet.
- ▶ The kingdom is not always a place of perfect harmony!
- ▶ All are invited but everyone is required to respond appropriately to the invitation. The inappropriately dressed commoner did not respond to the king's generosity appropriately and was thus expelled.
- ▶ Matthew's catechism was less a commentary on Israel's refusal to see what God was doing in Christ and more a warning to Christians to be diligent and to appropriately respond to God's grace. It was a call to fidelity and righteousness.
- ▶ Again: Actions speak louder than lip service!
- ▶ The Opening Prayer from Masses for Special Occasions: For the Laity in the Sacramentary eloquently expresses the prayer that should be on our hearts each and every day.

God our Father,
 you send the power of the gospel into the world
 as a life-giving leaven.
 Fill with the Spirit of Christ
 those whom you call to live in the midst of the world
 and its concerns;
 help them by their work on earth
 to build up your eternal kingdom.
 We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God forever and ever. ¹



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What does this parable have to say to your own life? Can you name an example from your own life in which you symbolically rejected God's invitation to the wedding banquet?
- ▶ What does this teach you about the reign of God in our lives?

¹Masses for Special Occasions: For the Laity, "Opening Prayer," *The Sacramentary*.

- ▶ What is the challenge for your life right now? How does this parable remind you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of responding to Jesus' call in this Gospel?
- ▶ What now do you see as the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What does the Gospel tell us is expected of us?
- ▶ What evidence is there that you are doing what is expected of you?
- ▶ What is there about the human condition that needs the challenge of this parable?
- ▶ What should you be doing—something that is expected of you—that you are not presently doing? What can you do to change that?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question. (@ three minutes)

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

Appendix

- Who are the excluded ones at our banquet feast today? What does the Gospel tell us is expected of us?

I had the privilege of experiencing this parable in real time. Many years ago at the very early Mass a man walked down the aisle in our Sunday assembly just as we were praying for the needs of God's people in the Prayers of the Faithful. He was wet, disheveled and dirty. He walked hunched over and broken right into our sanctuary. He knelt down before the cross, lifted his arms toward heaven and sobbed. He no sooner fell to his knees than he got up, straightened his disheveled shirt, and returned from whence he came.

Here was a man who was invited to the banquet but felt he could not stay. He was not one among us; he was separated by his homeless status.

Not one person in our assembly moved to that man, not the pastor, not me, not the director of music and liturgy, not one liturgical minister moved to offer solace to this man. We citizens of the kingdom shirked our responsibility to live according to the demands of kingdom living. The man accepted the king's invitation, but we, the supposed elite, did nothing to welcome him.

We later reflected on the experience. Each one of us said that we were waiting for the next person to move. Surely someone would move to him. By the time any of us thought to act, the man was gone.

It is a reminder to me that we simply cannot rest on our laurels and wait for the next person to act. Like Matthew's Gospel affirms, we must be diligent and stand ready to act in the flash of an eye. It was an amazing experience for me, one that I will never forget.

Jesus insists that all are welcome. Did I reject his invitation by not responding to the demands of Christian living? If God accepts us all, who am I not to embrace the "all" that God accepts?



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Mary Model for the Church
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory.
Kingdom of God
Catholic Social Teaching
Creed

Evangelization
Scripture and Revelation I or II
Symbols of Bread and Wine
Liturgical Year
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

October is the month we remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

Today's Gospel highlights one of Jesus' favorite themes. The reign of God is not what you expect it to be. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN < HELL AND PURGATORY.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Today's Gospel highlights one of Jesus' favorite themes. The kingdom of God is not what you expect it to be. Those who smugly think they are in will be out and those who think they are out will be in. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus used the parable of the banquet to challenge the elitism of those with higher social status. Jesus' challenged the chief priests and elders. His parable was intended to highlight their exclusive elitism. He contrasted their exclusivity with the inclusive, welcoming inclusivity of God. In God's kingdom all are welcome—no one is excluded. Such is the theology that underpins Catholic Social Teaching. The dignity of every person is

respected and upheld. We all stand equal before God. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

CREED

Some scholars suggest that Matthew uses this parable as a catechism on the history of salvation. What exactly do we believe? God chose Israel. God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel. God created Israel into a people. God led the people from slavery to freedom. God provided for them in the Promised Land. Then the people sinned. God sent his messengers the prophets (servants in the parable) to invite the people to repent and prepare them for the new banquet his Son (Jesus) would prepare. The people rejected the Son. God then sent new messengers—the apostles to repeat the invitation. The Son was rejected and God sent more servants (apostles) to repeat the invitation. Again the people rejected their invitation. The first guests (Israel) refused the invitation to the banquet (kingdom). The apostles were instructed to go out and invite the good and bad because both exist in the kingdom—saint and sinner-Gentile and Jew. The Gentiles accept the offer and the Church was born. The parable professes belief in what God has done in salvation history. Much of what we believe about God's action in our history is alluded to in this parable. It is thus a good springboard for focusing our attention on the Christian CREED.

EVANGELIZATION

The king tells his servants to go out into the highways and byways and invite new guests to the banquet. His is an invitation to share the Good News. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus is the revelation of God. Jesus teaches us the mind and heart of God and his plan for establishing his kingdom on earth as we await the kingdom yet to come. The king prepares a banquet for us and at that banquet the king is present and welcomes everyone. Jesus reveals the King (God) to us. He reveals God to all believers. That revelation continues in God's revealed, holy word. It is fitting that we focus our attention today on SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

One cannot miss the allusion to the Eucharist in the theme of banquet in which all are invited. Eucharist is the eschatological banquet in which the saints in heaven and saints on earth feast at the Great Banquet. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on the SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.